

December 11, 1973

Dr. Alfred Mirsky  
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New York, New York 10021

Dear Alfred,

I was interested to get your letter of November 15th, and I hope that I am not replying too tardily to be of use to you.

I am finding it a little difficult to recreate the mood and the context of that Ciba Symposium. Many of the points that were being discussed rather hypothetically at that time have become urgently advocated matters of policy -- e.g. the vicious ideas that Shockley is promulgating. Also I find that on many related issues now that Francis Crick and I have diverged very considerably. I am not sure that I can point to a great deal in that discussion on which I am sure that I have changed my mind, but I suspect that the questions would be interpreted rather differently today than they were at that time.

The most constructive thing to do is to send you some of my more recent discussions of similar issues and leave it to you to relate them to that conference. Basically I would say that as long as we are so divided culturally classwise and racially as we are in this country today that the social benefit of hypothetical genetic programs that become entangled with class etc., is outweighed by the enormous political costs.

In discussing such policies as financial incentives for reproduction I was thinking primarily of youngsters pursuing their higher education but I realize that this idea is pretty much overtaken by the ZPG ideology and the justifications for it. It sounds much more racist than anything I had in mind at the time.

The context has changed so much that it can be very misleading to read such material as if it were written today.

Have you seen the commentary by Provine in a recent issue of Science? It is rather superficial on the overall patterns of ideological influence on scientific policy advice but it does bring out some interesting points of caution.

Yours sincerely,

Joshua Lederberg  
Professor of Genetics

JL/rr

Mirsky, 12/24/73